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THE RELATION OF THE LIBRARY TO THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH¹

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Among the anomalies of modern culture is the existence of a superstitious reverence for books as books, together with a lack of organized effort to produce useful books or promote the use of the more useful. A similar feeling exists for libraries. They seem to be considered an end in themselves, especially when their collections and their circulation are large. They satisfy the demands of individuals, occasionally at least, but they do not, I am certain, satisfy the needs of society. They are not related organically to either educational, industrial, or civic institutions.

It is not enough that librarians secure the co-operation of other librarians. This is important because it adds to local library resources those of all associated libraries. But far more important is the co-operation of officers of other institutions and societies making use of books. A metropolitan library or a college library with its staff of specialists may preserve a certain measure of independence, and does as a matter of fact do so more than is wise. The unnecessary duplication of libraries in almost every large city is evidence of this. But in the smaller cities and towns where the library cannot afford to employ a staff of specialists, and schools and other organizations cannot afford to institute libraries of their own, the closest relations should be established between libraries and schools and other related institutions.

I do not wish to suggest the rehabilitation of existing library boards and committees. They are useful as far as they go; some of them are very useful indeed. I have in mind rather the multiplication of library committees. These auxiliary committees should not be committees of the library board but committees of other

¹A paper read before the National Council of Teachers of English, at Chicago, November 27, 1914.

organizations. Their function would be to do locally just such work as has been done by the committees on composition and on equipment of this Council. For if there is to be the wisest possible selection of books for addition to the library and if there is to be the widest possible use of these collections, the advice and assistance of experts, either official or semiofficial, is absolutely essential, and nowhere more so than in the department of literature.

I should hesitate to suggest that the library committees which seem to me so essential a part of the modern library organization should undertake to censor our reading if I were not conscious that our reading is already censored in New York and Chicago and censored primarily from a commercial point of view.

It would be interesting to see how far changed literary standards are due to the large foreign population in the larger cities—to discover what proportion of American writers are of foreign birth or of foreign parentage—and how far the changed standards are due to other urban conditions. But however the change may be explained, there is no doubt that a change has taken place and that instead of one standard, or approximately one, there are many standards, and instead of a few well-defined classes of literature, an infinite variety of classes. This alone makes the problem of selecting books for the use of any community a difficult one.

But it is rendered much more difficult by the fact that the advertisements of publishers in the popular metropolitan magazines and equally sentimental reviews in local newspapers create a demand for books which must be recognized. It is not sufficient to say that a book will not be purchased until it is a year old. If it is a good book it should be purchased while it is being written about and talked about, and in such numbers as prospective use warrants.

Now in the ordinary community to whom should we look for advice in the selection of current literature, to whom should we turn for an authoritative expression of opinion regarding current literature, or by whom should we seek deliverance from the domination of Grub Street if not by our teachers of literature? It is they who should select literature for our libraries and review it in our newspapers. The duties of the teacher, and particularly the teacher of English literature, can no longer be confined to the

walls of the classroom and the few years of the school course; they must extend also to the home, to all societies interested in literature, and to that great company whose sole study is the newspaper.

THE SCHOOL PROBLEM

In addition to the community library problem there is the school library problem. There is, perhaps, no department of instruction for which this is a more serious problem than for the English department. In the program of instruction the place of the old chrestomathies has been taken by the list of prescribed reading and the collateral reading required by present methods of study. The equipment necessary to carry out the new program has not, however, been secured.

This lack of equipment is due primarily to limited appropriations and unlimited numbers of students. These we shall undoubtedly continue to have. But it is due hardly less, it seems to me, to lack of adjustment between the ideals of the classroom and the resources of the library. In our older schools the pupil was expected to provide his own books; in the schools of today pupils expect to have books provided for them. From the point of view of economical and effective library administration it would be easier to do this if less emphasis were laid on uniform courses and much less emphasis laid on examinations. We are now under the necessity of furnishing a hundred or more copies of a given book for use for a week or two only, whereas if a pupil had some option in his reading he might be enough interested in it to purchase the books needed, or, at any rate, enough interested to interest others in the reading of the same books. May we not recognize the necessity of uniform or standard courses both as a basis for entrance examinations and as preparation for future study and reading, and at the same time allow the substitution of equivalents by accredited schools and teachers, and by pupils in good standing? There has been some differentiation of courses to meet the needs of commercial students; may we not allow other individuals some latitude in their work?

Next in importance to the question of required reading among questions common to classroom and library is that of examinations.

In English, as in other subjects, examinations bring to libraries a vagrant crowd who hope by eleventh-hour reading to secure a pass mark. This eleventh-hour reading undoubtedly does produce pass marks, but that is all.

If examinations must needs be, should we not aim in them less to discover what a pupil knows about a book than to learn what he has done with the book or what the book has done to him? Professor Chubb, I believe, places such an examination at the beginning of his secondary course, and Professor Abbott and others have made interesting studies of the literary likes and dislikes of pupils. I wish that these studies might be made a regular part of the course of study and the results of them reported to the library. But I would do more than ask the names of favorite books, or which books pupils have enjoyed most during the past year. I would ask with regard to the books recommended for reading whether the pupil had talked about the books which he had chosen to read at home, whether he had read them or parts of them to any member of his family, whether he had persuaded anyone else to read them, and whether he had purchased copies of the books for his own library.

I speak of these two questions of required reading and of examinations with some diffidence because they are primarily pedagogical questions and only secondarily library questions, but my diffidence is modified by the fact that they are old questions and still open ones, and that the library aspect of each question is a practical one worthy of careful consideration.

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

Whether it is possible to effect any considerable change in regard to the reading required of a class or not, it is possible to do much to encourage supplementary reading in the home, in literary societies, and in many other ways.

A librarian has, perhaps, a better opportunity than anyone else to see how large a proportion of children live in homes where their reading is not guided. A number of libraries with the assistance of teachers have done something to better these conditions by the publication of lists of books for home reading, for vacation reading,

etc. This Council also has recognized these conditions by the appointment of the Committee upon Home Reading and the publication of the "List of Books for Home Reading of High-School Pupils." More will be done in this direction, without question; more, too, in the direction of giving credit for home reading.

But we should not, it seems to me, content ourselves with encouraging home reading; we should also encourage home libraries and assist in their formation. It is possible at any rate to learn whether there is a home library already, how large it is, and what periodicals are taken; and it may be possible to take up incidentally questions of editions, of printing, and of binding, and also the use of publishers' and booksellers' catalogues. Some words upon these subjects, however lightly spoken, will surely do something to promote the establishment of better private libraries. The private library of today with its ponderous collections and complete works is chiefly the product of publishers' enterprise; the private library of the future will, I believe, represent more truly the studies and the taste of those who possess and use it.

Hardly less important than the private library as an auxiliary of the public library is the society library or book or magazine club. Literary, dramatic, and debating clubs, city history clubs, and biology reading clubs like those in the Brooklyn Girls' High School are increasing in number and importance. In some of our older colleges these societies did as much as any agency to promote the development of the college library, and in many colleges they are still doing much to increase library collections and promote their use. They may, I believe, be made equally effective in high schools, provided teachers and alumni take an interest in them. No books or magazines mean quite as much to a student as those which he has purchased or assisted in purchasing and has discussed with his associates. It would be most unfortunate should public libraries supplant either private or society libraries; and it would be even more unfortunate should the school fail to recognize the importance of these societies and compel them to take refuge in the library or elsewhere. It is perhaps not essential that they hold all of their meetings in the school building, but it is essential that

their work be organically related to the work of the school and to the work of the library also.

THE SCHOOL LIBRARY AND THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

I have emphasized the importance of individual ownership of books and the value of the literary society and its collections partly because I feel that in the study of literature pre-eminently individual study and individual initiative are everything, and partly because there has been a tendency to depend too much upon the school library and the public library; especially upon the latter. No one who carefully considers the needs of students, however, can fail to recognize the necessity of a library in both school and community. The public library alone is insufficient, because a public reading-room is no place for the regular work of young students, particularly girls, the books in it are not selected and displayed in a way to meet the special needs of elementary students, and they are too far removed from the schoolroom to be of more than occasional use. A school library is an essential part of a well-organized school.

A room and a few books ordinarily constitute the library, and this is enough to satisfy all who will visit the place as long as there is no librarian. But as soon as the library becomes more than a place to do penance in, a librarian will be necessary. Indeed, the organization of the school library should be as good as, if not better than, that of the public library, because it is during the school years that habits of study are formed and methods of research learned, if ever, and because it is easier to form habits of study and become acquainted with methods of research in a small library, provided it is well organized, than it is in a large one.

A school librarian is, moreover, in a better position than anyone else to bring the school into the closest possible relations with the public library; to see, for example, that books in the public library needed for use in the school are brought to the school; to see that books which should be reserved for the use of classes or debating teams in special reading-rooms or on special tables or shelves in the public library are placed there; or to see that the illustrated and other editions, the pictures, lantern slides, phonograph records,

and other material required for class use are available at the proper time.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL INSTRUCTION

Most important of all the duties of the librarian, however, are his duties as instructor. To find a book for a reader is only the beginning of library service; its goal is to enable readers to find books for themselves. It is still a question for consideration whether bibliographical instruction in the college and secondary school should constitute a separate course or be incorporated in the course in history or literature. As a matter of fact it is more commonly given as a part of the English course, apparently because this is a required course. No other arrangement is desirable as long as the instruction given in this course is satisfactory to other departments.

Such instruction must in the nature of things be general and elementary, but even so it will be unsatisfactory both to teachers and to pupils unless it is carefully planned and the plan of study carefully carried out. I should like to urge that this Council appoint a committee to consider what place bibliographical instruction has in the course in English, at what period or periods in the course such instruction should be given, how much time should be given to it in the classroom and in the library, how much may be required in the direction of written work, either essays upon the library or bibliographies of assigned subjects, and how much practice work pupils should be allowed to do in taking care of classroom libraries, in work in the school library and in the public library. I commend this question particularly to your attention, because he alone has gained the freedom of the library who understands its aims, its organization, and its equipment.